



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

McPherson Governmental Campus
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District 1 - Craig Curry, Commissioner
District 2 - Kathy Bryant, Chairman
District 3 - Matt McClain, Commissioner
District 4 - Carl Zalak III, Vice Chair
District 5 - Michelle Stone, Commissioner

August 5, 2025

Commission on Professional Credentialing

Center for Public Safety Excellence
4501 Singer Court, Suite 180
Chantilly, VA 20151

Re: Fire Chief James Banta Recommendation for Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Designation

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my honor to write this letter of reference in support of Chief James Banta's application for the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) designation through the Center for Public Safety Excellence.

As Chair of the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, I have had the privilege of working directly with Chief Banta for many years and have observed firsthand the tremendous impact of his leadership on our fire rescue system, our county government, and our community as a whole. His professionalism, integrity, and strategic vision have elevated Marion County Fire Rescue into one of the most progressive and respected departments in the state of Florida.

Chief Banta has guided MCFR through a period of remarkable growth and operational improvement. Under his leadership, the department has expanded services, improved response times, enhanced firefighter safety, and initiated a multi-year plan to provide all personnel with two sets of bunker gear to support cancer prevention. He has also led efforts to build new state-of-the-art fire stations and EMS facilities -most notably, EMS Central, the busiest EMS station in the county, made possible through collaborative efforts he helped forge between Marion County, the Hospital District, and private health care partners.

Chief Banta's influence extends beyond infrastructure. He has been a driving force in long-range strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, and fiscally responsible budgeting. He leads with humility and purpose, always focused on empowering his personnel and improving the service provided to the citizens of Marion County. His initiatives in mental wellness, employee development, and community risk reduction reflect the values of a modern, forward-thinking fire service executive.

As an elected official, I greatly appreciate Chief Banta's ability to effectively communicate complex operational and financial issues, present clear and actionable solutions, and build trust across all levels of government and the community. He embodies the leadership qualities that the CFO designation exists to recognize.

I give Chief Banta my highest recommendation and full support for this well-deserved professional credential. Please feel free to contact me should you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Bryant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathy" and last name "Bryant" clearly distinguishable.

Kathy Bryant, Chairman
Marion County Commission

CC: Board of County Commissioners
Mounir Bouyounes, County Administrator